

Blanchard Forest

A working forest in an urbanizing setting



Blanchard Forest is comprised of 4,800 acres of forested state trust lands managed by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The forest is centered on the southern-most mountain of the majestic Chuckanut Range, just south of the Skagit/Whatcom county line, representing a coastal forest in a unique community setting that is rapidly urbanizing. Blanchard Forest has superlative ecological and recreation qualities, as well as significant timber production potential that helps fund Skagit County services, local education, and contributes to the local natural resource based economy.

In spring 2006, the Blanchard Forest Strategies Group was appointed by State Lands Commissioner Doug Sutherland to help the department develop long-term management strategies for this valuable asset. The group was given legal and policy parameters within which they developed their conceptual strategies for this working forest. They have developed a set of consensus management recommendations that embrace a wide range of benefits reflective of the uniqueness of Blanchard Forest and its importance to the community.

Commissioner Sutherland will be given the resulting strategies in addition to input from the community. If you would like to offer your ideas regarding Blanchard, please provide them to DNR, at the open house, to the e-mail: BlanchardForest@dnr.wa.gov, or mail to DNR at 919 N. Township St., Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284-9384.



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands

Blanchard Forest Strategies Group

Eron Berg
Friends of Blanchard

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Past President, Economic Development Council of Skagit County;
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Natural Resource Lands Policy Coordinator, Skagit County: a major beneficiary of revenue from Blanchard Forest state trust lands

Clay Sprague
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John Howell
Facilitator for Group meetings,
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BLANCHARD FOREST STRATEGIES GROUP

Consensus Recommendations and Points of Agreement

I. Manage Blanchard Forest according to Four Management Zones and Two Management Overlays with appropriate management emphasis (See map of conceptual zone locations and recommended management directions).

A. Management Zones

1. **Core zone** managed in a similar manner to a permanently protected Natural Resource Conservation Area with emphasis on wildlife habitat, older forest conditions, vistas, and maintenance of forest ecosystem health; while allowing non-motorized, low impact recreation such as horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking, and hang gliding.
2. **Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) areas** managed consistent with the goals, objectives, and conditions of the HCP regarding ecologically sensitive areas and protected species and habitat requirements.
3. **High visual sensitivity zone** managed for visual impact mitigation as guided by the Board of Natural Resources new Policy for Sustainable Forests through the use of visually sensitive management prescriptions.
4. **General management zone** managed for revenue production for trust beneficiaries consistent with the trust mandate, the HCP and other applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

B. Management Overlays (to all zones)

1. A future recreational overlay will be developed for trails and other recreational uses that provide multiple recreational experiences in each of the management zones but does not reduce the net area available for timber production within the general management or high visual sensitivity zone.
2. A future demonstration working forest overlay will be developed that emphasizes natural resource stewardship, the role of State Forest trust lands and the enduring values of a working forest in an urban setting.

II. Support maintaining working forests and securing sustainable timber supply in Skagit and Whatcom Counties using a variety of tools consistent with local Growth Management policies (RCW 36.70A).

- A. Support state acquisition of private timber lands from willing landowners in proximity to Blanchard State Forest
- B. Support an array of tools, such as purchase of development rights and conservation easements to permanently conserve timberlands as working forests and to prevent conversion of additional forest lands.
- C. Develop and implement strategies to conserve and stabilize private industrial timber supply while exploring ways to encourage sustainable timber production from non-industrial forest landowners.
- D. Form public and private partnerships to work with the U.S. Forest Service on implementing federal land management plans on the Mount Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest. The initial focus will be the Finney Adaptive Management Area.¹
- E. Seek support from Washington's congressional delegation and the U. S. Department of Agriculture for the objectives in II(D).

III. Provide Skagit County Trust Compensation

- A. Work with Skagit County to develop strategies to fully compensate the Skagit county State Forest Trust including the junior taxing districts that currently receive revenue from Blanchard forest, to replace revenues that would otherwise be lost from the core management zone. These strategies should include the acquisition of in-holdings in and around Blanchard Forest and other holdings in and adjacent to DNR-managed forest lands in Skagit County for general forest management.

¹ The Northwest Forest Plan created the Finney Adaptive Management Area to encourage innovative and creative resource management approaches, with a management objective of restoring late-successional and riparian habitat components.

- B. Develop contingency strategies for the core zone if milestones for compensation funding cannot be reached within 5 years.

IV. Ensure Long-term Durability of Blanchard Management Agreement

- A. The parties of the “Blanchard Strategies Work Group” agree to fully support these recommendations and to speak and act in their support in order to ensure the future vision of Blanchard Forest as a working forest in an urban setting.
- B. Design a mechanism that ensures the long-term durability of the management of Blanchard Forest and all the recommendations of this proposal.



BLANCHARD FOREST STRATEGIES GROUP Additional Recommended Management Directions

(See Map of Core)

Core Size

- The map representing Blanchard Forest and the core zone will require further refinement. It has been provided as a reasonable representation of the intent of the Blanchard Forest Strategies Group. A final map for management purposes (based on additional field inspection and detailed mapping) will be developed by DNR for review and use with the future Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee (see below).
- It is the intent of the Strategies Group to create a core zone that is approximately 1,600 acres in size.
- DNR will work in collaboration with the future Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee to do additional review of timber management strategies in three areas: labeled “CC” and “JJ” along the western edge of the core and “B” on the southern slope outside the core.

Ecological Management inside the Core Zone

- Intent is to hasten the development of late succession conifer forest without roads, compatible with recreational objectives for the core.
- Ecological management will be consistent with management activities described in the Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) statute.
- Timber volume and revenue is a by-product, not an objective, of ecological management inside of the core.
- Based on management strategies and plans to be developed by DNR, in collaboration with the Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee (see below).
- Develop a phased approach, with expansion of areas receiving ecological management in select areas based on experience in initial phases and review by the Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee.
- Objective is to conduct ecological management without roads. However, if DNR and the Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee determine that roads will assist in enhancing ecological benefits under special circumstances, roads would meet following conditions: 1) temporary in nature and minimal in length, 2) use of construction standard with minimal impact, 3) would be removed (at a standard in between “obliteration” and “abandonment”) after use, ideally within 1 year.

Roads

- Outside of the core DNR will develop a road system to support the anticipated harvest.
- DNR will construct roads in the southwest quadrant (between Max's Shortcut Trail and the trail from Chuckanut Drive to Oyster Dome) and in the eastern quadrant (above the B-2000 road and below the core zone). DNR also can construct a road from the Southwest quadrant to the Eastern quadrant, along the southern slope outside of the core zone. If a road along the southern slope is built it will be designed and constructed to create a road that is smaller than a "typical" logging road and reduces impacts on recreational use but still meets the department's operational needs and complies with the state Forest Practices rules regarding road construction.
- When proposed harvest activities intersect with trail use, DNR will work with user groups and the Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee to consider appropriate strategies for managing potential conflicts (i.e., signage and advance notice, potential trail relocation, and other approaches).

Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee

- Assist DNR by making recommendations for management of Blanchard Forest (both inside and outside of the core).
- Serve as the community-based entity to help implement the agreement reached by the Blanchard Strategies Group.
- At a minimum, membership on the advisory committee would 1) be consistent with the membership interests represented on the Blanchard Strategies Group – a broad representation of interests (including a range of non-motorized, low-impact, recreational interests), and 2) include forest ecology expertise. The interests represented on the Strategies Group include Skagit County (representing beneficiaries' interests), the Friends of Blanchard Mountain, Backcountry Horsemen, Skagit County business and civic interests, Skagit Land Trust, Conservation Northwest, Skagit Forest Advisory Board, and timber/forest management expertise.
- Committee would operate on consensus basis.

Implementation

- Blanchard Strategies Group will reach consensus on conceptual agreement
- DNR will work with parties to prepare a formal agreement, signed by the parties participating in the Blanchard Strategies Group.
 - Agreement will provide time horizon (5 years has been suggested) for all parties to support actions/strategies described in this document and the "Outline of Blanchard Forest Strategies Group Concepts" – i.e. maintain or increase timber supply in Skagit County, provide Skagit County Trust compensation, maintain or increase public and private working forests in Skagit and Whatcom County.
 - If milestones are not achieved within 5 years, agreement on Blanchard Forest will need to be revisited.
- DNR will collaborate with the Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee as part of its process to develop management strategies and plans that include Blanchard Forest.
- During initial five year implementation phase, DNR will conduct harvest in areas outside of the core zone consistent with the DNR sustainable harvest model (currently covering the period of 2004 to 2014) for the Skagit County State Forest Trust Lands. Based on that model, the annual area harvested on Blanchard Forest will average approximately 2% of the entire ownership (currently 4827 acres) in that area until such time that full compensation is secured and/or a new sustainable harvest level is calculated that places the core in long-term deferral status. DNR will review proposed harvests with the Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee and the community.
- In consultation with the Blanchard Forest Advisory Committee, the department will make changes in forest, ecosystem and recreational management strategies based on new information or changing circumstances.

Information will be updated on DNR's website as the process continues: www.dnr.wa.gov

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